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ABSTRACT

A summer program offered by Eastern Kentucky University to ease the transition to the college environment for high school seniors is described. The six-week program, called "College Warm-Up," involves seven hours of credit classes in English composition, academic orientation, and college reading and study skills. The academic orientation course provides an introduction to the university's organization, programs, and procedures through study of the university catalog, student handbook, and schedule, as well as other assignments. Among the activities in the college reading and study skills course are precis writing, listening and note-taking techniques, vocabulary development, and test-taking skills. Smaller seminar groups also meet to provide close personal attention. Warm-up participants are also offered the opportunity to preregister for the fall semester. Evaluation of the program by participants revealed a very positive response in terms of meeting student expectations and students' confidence about attending college. Since implementation of the program in 1978, enrollment has increased every year. Those involved with the administration of the program are positive about its growth, cost accountability, its employment of faculty for the summer, its attraction of students to Eastern Kentucky University, and its preparation for students for persisting at the university. (SW)

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College Warm-Up: Innovative Preparation for College

The transition from high school to college often proves to be a difficult one for students; freshmen dropout rates are as high as 35% at four-year public schools and often reach 50% at two-year public schools. Furthermore, recent studies (What Works in Student Retention, 1980) show a generally negative trend in retention rates for these institutions. Freshmen attrition derives from no one factor, but from many. These include inadequate academic advising, lack of faculty care and concern, inadequate academic support services, inadequate student-faculty contact, and inadequate financial aid. An important catalyst which helps such negative campus characteristics discourage first-year students is the environment in which the students are confronted with these problems and for which they are unprepared: coursework requiring strong academic skills and diligent study habits; an unfamiliar campus which may seem impersonal; large classes; and the academic and social regulations and responsibilities imposed by colleges.

For the last four years, Eastern Kentucky University has supported a summer program designed to ease the transition to the college environment for high school seniors. This program, called the College Warm-Up program, was conceived by Dr. Roy Barlow -- who was Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies when he first proposed the idea -- and developed and refined by Dr. Barlow and Dr. Jim Libbey, who was the program's first director. The originators of the program hoped that College Warm-Up would allow high school graduates to experience a summer term of college before attempting their

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first full academic semester and thus return in the fall with a head start in college, enthusiastic attitudes about their college careers, and reduced chances of dropping out after their first year.

A national survey (WWISR, 1980) conducted jointly by the American College Testing Program and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems gives the following as one of its conclusions: "Action programs most likely to be a benefit to retention and to the campus include those that involve orientation, advising, learning and academic support, and counseling, and use multiple approaches directed toward target groups..." College Warm-Up, though not a true retention action program, uses such a multiple approach along with other features planned to enhance the summer school experience for its participants.

The program is six weeks in duration, two weeks less than Eastern's regular summer session. Warm-Up participants thus avoid regular summer school registration and enroll during a special registration which is quite simple and relaxed in comparison with the process with which most students must contend.

The seven hours of credit classes offered by the program were chosen to provide the students with constructive starts on their college programs; the classes are English Composition, Academic Orientation, and College Reading and Study Skills. The composition course is required of all students at Eastern as is orientation, and the College Reading and Study Skills course can be used by the students to partially fulfill either general education requirements or restricted elective requirements.

In the orientation class -- which is taught by the program's director, who also serves as the students' advisor for the summer -- the students are

introduced to the university's organization, programs and procedures through study of the university catalog, student handbook, and schedule book. Assignments often require the students to go to various offices and facilities (e.g., the library, the financial aid office, the counseling center) to find information and/or procure forms to simulate situations often encountered by students at the university. When it is time for the course's final examination, the students are expected to be very familiar with the school's academic regulations, the general education program, student rights and responsibilities, services and facilities, and important procedures. Undecided students also try SIGI (System of Interactive Guidance and Information), an interactive computer-based aid designed to assist students in discovering/clarifying the career goals and job characteristics that they value.

The College Reading and Study Skills class is taught in the Department of Learning Skills, the school's nationally-recognized academic support center, and provides students with invaluable academic tools and knowledge pertinent to success in college classes. Far too many high school seniors enter colleges with inadequate learning and study skills and are forced to struggle with university-level work; they may conclude that they are not "college material" and drop out, not realizing that poor academic preparation is the source of their difficulties. It is hoped that Warm-Up participants will be able to avoid such experiences as they draw on the skills developed in the study skills class: précis writing, listening and note-taking techniques, mnemonics and memory, vocabulary development, test-taking, and practical application of learning theory.

Because full credit is earned for the courses in the shortened, six-week period, it is necessary for two afternoon seminars per week to be used

to provide the required hours of class time. In the seminars the students are divided into groups smaller than class size and receive close personal attention as they write themes, take quizzes, or do other work required by the composition class and study skills class. The seminars provide excellent opportunity for the faculty and students to become better acquainted while working in a friendly, encouraging atmosphere and for the faculty to give some individual attention to those students who need it.

Each faculty member for the program is chosen for his/her ability to give students a positive, nurturing academic experience in the classroom while effectively imparting the subject matter of the courses. New students exposed to such considerate and professional individuals can set aside apprehensions about "uncaring" college professors and concentrate on the classes themselves. In evaluating the summer program, most students, when asked what they liked best about the program, say "everything"; but "the faculty" is chosen as the response to the question more frequently than any other single factor.

An additional benefit that Warm-Up participants receive from being on campus in the summer is the opportunity to pre-register for Eastern's fall semester. Pre-registration ensures that the students get the classes they need for their first full semester and also acquaints them with an important university process. Preparation of individual trial schedules for the first 1-2 semesters of school in orientation class prepares the students for pre-registration.

A true and stringent test of an effort such as the College Warm-Up program is an evaluation by its participants. At the close of each summer's program, the students complete a formal evaluation of their summer experience. The responses from last summer's groups (summer of 1980) to three

key questions reflect the general attitude and enthusiasm of the students: more than 98% said the program fulfilled or partially fulfilled their expectations; more than 96% said they now felt more confident about attending college because of the program; and 100% said they would recommend College Warm-Up to a friend graduating from high school. Such plenary endorsement of the program is, it is hoped, a strong indication of the positive concept of the university formed by the students and of the gained confidence and knowledge with which they can approach their first full semester of college.

The summer of 1981 will be the fourth summer of operation for the College Warm-Up program. The program has increased enrollment every year, and last summer fifty-five students participated. Those involved with the administration of the program are pleased with many of its aspects: its growth, its cost accountability, its employment of faculty for the summer, its attraction of students to Eastern, and, most importantly, its excellent preparation of students for persisting at the university in pursuit of a college degree. When enough students have completed the program to provide sufficient data, a study of Warm-Up's effects upon matriculation and persistence will be undertaken and may well provide information vital for retention planning. It should also demonstrate that the program has effectively accomplished its mission of helping high school seniors make the transition to college.

REFERENCE

What Works in Student Retention (The American College Testing Program and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 1980).